



Sir Steve Redgrave: Full circle

Britain's greatest ever Olympian, [Sir Steve Redgrave](#), has 16 years' experience of competing at Olympic Games all over the world. As well as rowing his way to an astonishing five Gold medals during that period, he has witnessed triumphs and disasters in event planning. Here, he talks to [Julian Barlow](#) who has worked with Sir Steve since 2000, about his determination to help Britain derive the maximum long-term benefits from the 2012 Games, and his role within this process as an ambassador for Gleeds, the sponsors of this special edition of Locum Destination Review.

Sir Steve Redgrave was an integral part of London's bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games from the very outset. He was a key player in initially persuading the Government to back the bid, and chaired the athletes' advisory group for 2012, working closely with the chairman, Lord Coe. Given the significant role played by Sir Steve in winning the right to stage the Games last July, along with the five consecutive Olympic Gold medals for rowing that he won over the last two decades, one might expect (and indeed encourage) him to sit back and bask for a while.

But despite his down-to-earth, self-effacing nature, Sir Steve is a determined man, and one with a mission. Although he currently has no official role so far in the 2012 Olympics, he is relishing his independence and is keen to ensure that the legacy of the Games lives on well after the Olympic Torch moves to pastures new. And Sir Steve has a reputation for achieving what he sets out to do. When he retired from rowing five years ago, he founded the Sir Steve Redgrave Trust, with a goal of raising £5 million over five years, a feat he has accomplished. He had already raised over £3 million before increasing that by £1.8 million when he ran in the 2006 Flora Marathon, breaking the previous record for the most amount of money raised by one individual competing in a marathon. He is also diabetic, and has worked tirelessly with Diabetes UK to raise awareness of the condition and assure people with diabetes that they can continue to live a normal life.



Sporting legacy

Britain's greatest Olympian believes that 2012 is about much more than sporting prowess. He passionately believes that the London Games represent the greatest opportunity he has witnessed in his lifetime to raise the levels of participation in sport and, in turn, improve the health of the nation.

'The Olympics is the biggest sporting event in the world and it's going to be held in our country – to say it's exciting is an understatement. But it's important that the Games are not just about sports people at the highest elite level, and that they leave a legacy for everyone, that reaches far and wide and lasts for years to come.'

Key to his vision of the future is the fact that the facilities created for the 2012 Olympics remain available for use once the Games are over. 'In Athens, the stadiums and venues were very impressive but they just aren't usable. It's not inspirational for an athlete to train in an empty 80,000 capacity stadium. There's no atmosphere. But it would be a different matter if they were able to train in a 20- to 30,000 capacity venue, which is also the home of British athletics, as well as a venue for schools and youth-level athletes. Then these facilities would more than achieve their original purpose.'

Sir Steve also backs the idea of portable venues, which could be relocated across the UK after the Olympics have ended. 'The city of Paris has more 50-metre pools than we have in the whole of the UK. Five training pools will be created in London but once the Games are over, they will be distributed across the UK, ensuring everyone benefits. And as it costs a lot of money to maintain these sorts of facilities, a 25-year wind-down of funding will be put in place to ensure these facilities remain open and become self-funding. A lot of thought has gone into these details and these are all part of the legacy of the Olympics.'

Health of the nation

In addition to the range of sustainable sporting infrastructure that the Games will bequeath the nation, Sir Steve believes that the 2012 Olympics can act as a catalyst for tackling a much wider range of issues facing Britain today. 'There's a lot of enthusiasm from people about the Olympics and we should use this to not only get the younger generation interested in lots of different sports but look at related areas such as health, fitness, obesity and diet.' Expanding on this, he adds, 'Our culture has changed dramatically over the years, with more children being driven to school and less exercise actually being taken in schools, as well as a decrease in after-school clubs. We have to teach again that the food we eat has to be used up by some form of exercise – this is vital for the health of our nation and also for future generations.'





He cites his recent involvement in the newly launched Sports Search. This initiative uses a series of physical tests to show 11- to 17-year-olds the sports to which they are best suited. 'In schools, there is often only a small handful of sports available to play, so not everyone has the opportunity to do something they enjoy or are particularly good at. But if you are introduced to something you can do, you are more likely to do it and enjoy it in the process – that's motivational for young people and that is an achievable legacy.'



Sir Steve himself happened across his talent for rowing by accident. He recalls his English teacher at his small comprehensive ran a rowing club and always looked out for youngsters with big hands and feet who would be up to the physical challenge. He says, 'Rowing was never a sport I would have come into contact with at school itself, it just happened by chance but it just shows what can be achieved when someone's talents are channelled in the right way.'



**Julian Barlow,
Barlow Frith Communications**

Full circle

At an early age, Sir Steve also found himself working in the construction industry acting as unpaid labourer for his father, who owned a building firm in Buckinghamshire. 'I can honestly say that I was probably more of a hindrance than a help and although working on site helped my fitness, my mind was usually on other things – like sport.' From those early days on the building site, Sir Steve has come full circle, returning to the construction industry in a very different capacity – as an ambassador for Gleeds.



In this new role, Sir Steve will be providing motivation and inspiration to the company's staff, and working within its recruitment and training academy, which will involve some speaking on the university 'milk round' circuit. Gleeds regard Sir Steve as an invaluable resource, adding a new dimension to the business and helping them gain a unique insight into key areas of business development. Sir Steve sees the relationship as symbiotic, enabling him to communicate directly with the men and women in the construction industry who are shaping the foundations of the 2012 project. 'It is good to come back into the industry in my mid forties and to be able to play a role in the development of Gleeds, and contribute to the legacy issue, working with the industry from the inside.'

Above all, Sir Steve is thrilled at the prospect of once again being able to contribute to the Olympic effort, in a way that he hopes will have as big an impact on the nation as his legendary exploits in the rowing boat. 'We have a fantastic opportunity here. When we won the 2012 bid it was elation for us all, now we have the chance to use the event to bring lasting benefit to the whole country, not just London. I am looking forward to contributing to that process.'

The 2012 Olympics represent an extraordinary opportunity for Britain to channel new talents and inspire individuals to perform to the best of their ability, in the planning and delivery of the Games, and ultimately in the sporting arena. And if anyone can encourage this and inspire a lasting legacy, the extraordinary Sir Steve Redgrave certainly can.

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